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From Up North to Up West? London on Screen 1965–1967

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In his overview of the decade, Arthur Marwick wrote that the 'Sixties was a time of liberation for majorities in all Western countries, when teenage girls, supported by their mothers, could wear skirts as short as they pleased — and watch films such as Georgy Girl, which spoke directly to them.' This essay challenges such generalisations, and argues that while such films may have spoken 'directly' to their teenage audiences, there were accompanying moralistic subtexts around issues of gender, sexuality, class and power. It suggests that the so-called Swinging London films are best understood as a continuation of the 'British New Wave', where such concerns were paramount, but transported to a new metropolitan context and a new consumer culture. Finally, it makes the case that the images and iconography associated with Swinging London were generally created elsewhere in the media, and that these films worked in complex ways as a part of new dialogues around consumption.

Introduction

'Diana in *Darling*? She was extraordinary — Here was a girl who didn't want to be married, didn't want to have children and settle down like all those kitchen-sink heroines, didn't want to be respectable — no, Darling wanted to have everything . . . and so, of course, she had to be punished.'

So Julie Christie observed, when interviewed by Sara Maitland some twenty years later.¹ Christie is still seen as the epitome of the swinging Sixties, while the model, 'Diana Scott', whom she portrayed in *Darling* (1964), is a cinematic emblem of the era — perhaps, as this essay will suggest, for all the wrong reasons. Christie's first major role, creating her star persona as the physical embodiment of what seemed to be a new freedom, was that of the cheerful drifter, Liz, in the film *Billy Liar* (1963). This is the last of the films which cinematic critical consensus perceives as constituting the 'British New Wave', primarily united by their Northern industrial settings and male working-class protagonists.² Liz, one of the hero's three girlfriends, is the only character in this entire cycle to succeed in escaping from the grim cities that imprison the other protagonists. She returns home from time to time, and urges Billy (Tom Courtenay) to join her. 'It's easy', she tells him. 'You just get on a train — and in five hours you can be in London.'

This is exactly what Liz herself does in the final moments of the film. Although she has at last persuaded Billy to accompany her, when he finds himself finally standing on the station platform, with no excuses left, he contrives to miss the train by going off to

buy an unnecessary carton of milk. He watches Liz as the train takes her away — she waves and smiles until she is out of sight.

Alexander Walker concluded his discussion of this film with the famous observation that ‘British cinema caught the train south with Julie Christie.’³ Certainly this was the last film to use the Industrial North as backcloth, and the next tranche of British-made films were all set in the metropolis, often with female protagonists. But what Walker did not acknowledge — and what this essay will seek to establish — is that Liz/Julie did not travel to London alone. Though Billy certainly remained behind in Bradford, some unseen companions accompanied Liz on the train — those very issues around gender, sexuality and social class that had dominated the British New Wave.⁴ Indeed, I will argue that the London-based films which followed — and which have been discussed as if they constituted a new, separate cycle — were in many ways both a continuation, and a metropolitan reconfiguring, of the concerns that informed the Northern films. The London films are certainly just as moralistic — a strong puritanical tradition seems to be almost endemic within British cinema, and it has proved remarkably difficult to dislodge.

Liz/Julie was, in fact, the sole woman in the first group of films able to achieve sexual freedom without retribution of some kind — but when the same star was cast as the big-city heroine in *Darling*, the punitive forces returned to confront and to chastise. Furthermore, as Hill has emphasised in his study of the earlier cycle, consumption in these films is equated with the feminine and the superficial.⁵ This is of course developed much further in the London-based films, sited as they are at the very epicentre of the new modes of consumption, and that is what I wish to consider in this essay. The new ‘London’ films provided an opportunity to showcase different forms of fashionable behaviour, dress and décor, while at the same time subjecting them to a stern critique.

Diana, the anti-heroine of *Darling*, does not share her precursor Liz’s lack of interest in material possessions — which, once again, separates and distinguishes Liz from most of the young women in the earlier films. And Diana’s carefully-chronicled decline is seen to be partly the product of her professional involvement in the fashion industry, with its unseemly predators and meretricious hangers-on. Only an ambitious and shallow girl, it suggests, would allow herself to be so easily seduced.

This essay will examine the so-called ‘Swinging London films’, but not in the mode of traditional cinematic criticism — there will be no in-depth discussion of the formal elements of film, of editing, framing and mise-en-scène; visual elements will be examined as part of a different discourse. For this is not a ‘film studies’ essay *per se*, rather a move towards some understanding of the role that these films themselves played within much wider parameters.

Firstly, they should be scrutinised as a part of the changing climate of consumption, of new discourses around consumerism and within the wider context of rapid changes in the mass media. Television, newspapers, magazine journalism, radio — all changed both their forms and their content in a very short space of time, not merely in an attempt to encompass and reflect social change, but primarily to attract the new young audiences who, as research showed and demographics underlined, had most disposable income and purchasing power. New magazines — *Honey* and then *Petticoat*

— appeared, which directly addressed young girls, while established fashion magazines like *Vogue* were forced to make radical changes in their editorial policy and visual style, in order to appeal to a fashion-buying readership who were, for the first time, both youth-led and youth-dominated.

Secondly, the presentation of gendered behaviour within an altered climate of sexual activity needs to be scrutinised in order to clarify its conservatism, while the close portrayal of social ‘freedom’ and mobility actually makes it clear that, within cinema, these were invariably depicted as illusory and dangerous. Lastly, the very notion that there are — or were — a group of films that can be identified as Swinging London films must, itself, be questioned and their identity reconfigured. They are, rather, a disparate group of cinematic texts united by a common setting, by the comparative youth of their protagonists, and by their frank depiction of changing sexual mores. And central to the construction and appeal of these films, a further extension of their frail unity, are two elements which have been consistently overlooked — their theatrical or literary origins and their strong, jazz-inflected scores.

This essay examines these films and disentangles common threads — but it also argues that they should, in fact, be seen as an ideological and cultural extension of the Northern-based films. ‘London’ now serves as the new backdrop and battleground. The protagonists are female, the class milieu has changed — but the struggles have not. Far from celebrating a ‘Swinging London’, moreover, the films share a stubborn refusal to depict it — their topography is very different, their settings resolutely unfashionable.

Critical perspectives

The handful of critics within the world of cinema scholarship who have examined these films in any detail do indeed suggest that there are dark elements within some of the texts — but overall the consensus seems to be that they are in the main celebratory and invariably light-hearted.⁶ Elsewhere in the academy — amongst social historians, for example — this same assumption is made. Cultural historian — and author of a definitive work on this particular decade — Arthur Marwick reflects the accepted consensus in a rather problematic assertion:

The Sixties was a time of liberation for majorities in all Western countries, when teenage girls, supported by their mothers, could wear skirts as short as they pleased — and watch films such as *Georgy Girl*, which spoke directly to them.⁷

No one so far has properly emphasised both the casual misogyny and the conservative attitudes to class embedded deep within these cautionary tales of metropolitan life, nor the very particular way in which they depict the new patterns of consumption. Indeed, Moya Luckett — who does stress more than any other writer both the theme and the depiction of fashionable consumption — goes so far as to see them as wholly positive in their depiction of women’s new mobility, granting them ‘the power to draw boundaries and demarcate space’.⁸ Although she acknowledges Robert Murphy’s rider that the films do not ‘simply celebrate freedom, superficiality, popular culture and affluence, but instead fuse optimism with a keen and often self-reflexive social

criticism,⁹ she nevertheless sees these films as celebrating ‘mobile women’ and London as ‘the seat of feminine power’.¹⁰

Sadly, to occupy urban space is not necessarily to command it, while the ‘masculine rule’ that Lockett sees as ‘consigned to history’ within the new London reasserts itself vigorously within the majority of these texts — including one film she herself analyses in detail, *Darling*.¹¹ Here, she is forced to admit, ‘Diana’s agency is ultimately erased by men’.¹² This ultimately weakens her argument, as does her bizarre inclusion of the film *Repulsion* (1965). Its protagonist may be a beautiful Belgian manicurist, played by new French icon Catherine Deneuve, but Lockett’s claim that it focuses on ‘exile as existential crisis’, showing the character’s ‘dislocation’, her ‘isolation’ and ‘need for home’, is hardly enough to justify the two violent, unmotivated murders the girl eventually carries out. Here the heroine does not merely, through her exile, suffer a ‘loss of normal subjectivity’ — rather, she suffers a clearly demarcated descent into a fully-fledged psychotic breakdown.¹³ The South Kensington settings, Deneuve’s miniskirts and Chico Hamilton’s jazz score, although they are all tropes associated with these films, do not and cannot make of this a ‘Swinging London’ film. There is surely no basis for the suggestion that, even here, Polanski’s depiction of a woman’s psychic disintegration presents London as ‘site of female pleasure and autonomy’; rather, it is her sister’s wholehearted embrace of the carnal pleasures offered by this freedom that precipitates Deneuve’s breakdown.¹⁴ Interestingly, however, the film made the French starlet into a British fashion icon — the following year she married the photographer who created, recorded and symbolised Swinging London, David Bailey.

Those films that more usually comprise the critical ‘list’, along with *Darling*, are *The Knack* (1965), *Morgan*, *Alfie*, *Georgy Girl*, *Blow-Up*, all made in 1966, and, sometimes, the weak would-be parody *Smashing Time* (1967). The films *Kaleidoscope* (1966) and *Joanna* (1968) are invariably exempt from critical scrutiny, since the texts themselves are so wanting, their critical reception at the time so hostile, that their inclusion could undermine any attempts to present the cycle as meriting any extended academic debate. Indeed, all the traditionally accepted texts are so problematic, in different ways that they do not proffer up the stuff of parody — particularly given the hidden, disturbing sub-texts around gender, sexuality and consumption. The critics may agree that they are not straightforward celebrations of a hedonistic metropolitan lifestyle — but there is more to be uncovered than the usual noting of ‘self-criticism’.¹⁵

It would, of course, be very easy to suggest that any perceived ‘misogyny’ is simply the result of a retroactive reading of the films, a simple deployment of contemporary feminist sensibilities. But when the critical tools of the present are used to deconstruct the cultural products of the past, it may be — as here — that there are things to be found embedded in these texts that not only escaped scrutiny at the time — but could slip by, unnoticed, today. We might expect cinematic offerings of the past to affront feminist sensibilities — but these texts go further. Finally, at a time when, it was assumed, class barriers were breaking down, these films often emphasise the pernicious nature of this particular myth. Class barriers here hold firm and usurpers are reminded of their place.

Perhaps the best way to examine the ‘cycle’ is to advocate alternative modes of interpretation through a detailed focus on the central films. And when teasing out what,

if anything, really unites this miscellaneous clutch of cinematic texts, I would stress that it might help to see them as a continuation of, and coda to, the British New Wave.

The films were — as the publicity material and contemporary posters clearly show — targeted firmly at a young, nationwide audience, who might see themselves — or their fantasy selves — onscreen. Certainly there is a focus on youth and a metropolitan setting — but it is not as straightforward as the critical consensus would have us believe. Charlotte Brunsdon, for instance, states that in these films, which she refers to (after Alan Parker) as ‘red bus films’, there is always a sequence in which the characters occupy public space in Central London and ‘do it zanily.’¹⁶ In fact, *red* buses are thin on the ground in these mainly black-and-white films, although we do glimpse one in *Alfie*, one of the few actually to be made in colour — interestingly, ironically, it’s seen just as the hero enters a doctor’s surgery, after informing us that his chest X-ray has revealed some problems. This particular film is also notable for its complete lack of ‘zany’ or spontaneous behaviour of any kind, in public spaces or private. Although the others certainly do contain sequences of this nature, these are always very carefully undercut by other, darker moments, very often following on directly from these light-hearted episodes.

Yet the abiding image of the films does seem to be this cavorting in the streets — as evidenced by the sequences in the recent Austin Powers films.¹⁷ These films, in themselves a pastiche of the James Bond franchise, contain scenes where the central characters dance through recognisable London thoroughfares, past red telephone boxes and around guardsmen in bearskins, frolicking throughout to the accompaniment of well-known Sixties songs on the soundtrack. And these sequences surely emphasise the potency of the myths, not only around London itself, but also around the films listed above. In the period under scrutiny, the mythologising of London was, of course, generated and disseminated as an incentive to consumption, indeed was itself a part of the new patterning of consumption.

Yet only Luckett and Geraghty mention these new forms of consumption, and try to analyse the appeals made on screen to the young female consumer. In fact, within film scholarship, these films are usually ignored or bypassed. Those who do pay them some attention are invariably writing from a left wing or feminist perspective — Carrie Tarr, Christine Geraghty, Brunsdon who looks at them within the context of a recent essay on London in cinema, and Hill.¹⁸ He does in fact see both *Darling* and *Alfie* as a coda to the concerns with gender and social class he discusses — and is therefore chided for his Marxist Puritanism — wrongly I would argue — by Robert Murphy, who casts an indulgent eye over them in the course of the only other book-length study of British cinema in the Sixties.¹⁹

The more I myself watched these films, the more I found a strange discrepancy between the cinematic texts and the overall critical consensus. The films, far from depicting a ‘swinging’ London actually demonise the capital, the centre of fashionable and sexual consumption. And of course some of the central protagonists — Alfie himself, Georgy in *Georgy Girl*, everyone in *The Knack* apart from Tolen, Robert in *Darling* — while they may depart from conventional sexual behaviour, are far from ‘swinging’ in dress, demeanour and sometimes appearance.

Iconographies of 'London'

Configuring the new consumption

I would argue, instead, that the elements associated with the traditional visual depiction of a 'Swinging London' are actually to be found elsewhere, though this has never been correctly analysed nor acknowledged. In fact, they actually emerged as part of the new imagery in and around the music industry and elsewhere, and were also carefully constructed within print journalism. The new Sunday supplements had a vital part to play in the creation and reinforcement of the images associated with the 'new' London and its changing modes of consumption. So, too, did television and its new, music-based programmes for a young audience. Overall, there was a focus on youth, on dress, music, and make-up, together with a strong interest in interior décor and the coverage of newly fashionable Anglo-American art — the portrayal, in short, of what we have subsequently christened 'lifestyle'.

The bright colours associated with the new magazines and found on record covers were reinforced as symbolic of the period through their use in 'pop art'. The highly fashionable Robert Fraser Gallery — whose upper-class owner 'hung out' with pop singers and would later be involved in the famous Rolling Stones 'drug bust' — had a show in 1963 which showed the work of Andy Warhol and Claes Oldenburg among others.²⁰ The fusion of art and fashion, which had begun in the previous decade, was now extended to include music — and television. Mary Quant wrote of the so-called 'Chelsea Set' of the 1950s, who used her shop Bazaar as a meeting-place, that it included 'painters, photographers, architects, writers, socialites, actors, conmen and superior tarts'.²¹ In the sixties, this circle extended its ranks to include the new musicians and their girlfriends, whose glamour it welcomed.²² But the London haunts of these 'young meteors'²³ were notably absent from the films — where there is a careful avoidance of 'swinging London' landmarks and the comparative absence of establishing shots of the West End.

However, I would suggest that in the films there are instead other, overlooked hallmark scenes, signifiers, images, and shots which form an alternative set of tropes, a very different set of signs — which are mostly presented to us in the black-and-white photography of the French *nouvelle vague*, sometimes using the stylistic innovations to be found there, and deployed again in the British New Wave.

The films contain a dialogue around consumption very different from that found on sixties television and in the changed print journalism. There is a critique of consumerism and of the fashionable world, but it works in a very particular way within the cinematic narratives. However, its very omnipresence makes that self-same process of consumption both familiar and desirable — thus attracting young audiences while still offering up a moral subtext.

It is possible, then, to make an alternative 'list' of the tropes of fashionable London that was actually presented on cinema screens, and to reveal a very different patterning within these films. The list might begin with the irreverent scenes in expensive shops, and the dressing-up sequences where the heroine plays with a different identity by trying on clothes, hat or wig. In some films — *The Knack* and *Georgy Girl* — the fashionable offerings do not transform the heroine as in conventional Hollywood

cinema. Rather, they function as a transformation-in-reverse, stressing her deviation in face and figure from the desirable norm — though whether this makes of either heroine the ‘unruly woman’ of cinematic criticism, as Carson suggests, is debatable.²⁴

The list should include the scenes involving the new ‘art world’, its painters, gallery owners and private views — often unflattering, showing as they do smooth-tongued profiteers and crowds of sycophantic hangers-on. The new interest in the fashion-photographer-as-personality means that photographers, too, figure within some of the narratives — some films show us a photographic shoot, others an editorial meeting. In many films, the *mise-en-scene* may also show off the newly desirable ‘objets’, textures and colours of the fashionable interior decorator. And clothes associated with the new ‘London look’ are ‘modelled’ by some — though not all — of the characters.

Evoking the *nouvelle vague* — and clearly undercutting any triumphalism — there are the edgy, thoughtful modern jazz scores by Sonny Rollins, Chico Hamilton, Herbie Hancock, and Johnny Dankworth. Even the John Barry soundtracks for the films are funkier, sharper, and less lush than usual. This was the end of a process that began with Louis Malle’s film *Lift to the Scaffold* in 1959, where Miles Davis improvised around the sequences immediately after they were filmed. Occasionally, of course, there is the party-as-orgy sequence, first seen in *La Dolce Vita* in 1960 — where the ubiquitous Egg chair made its first screen appearance. In *Smashing Time*, the feeble satire that arguably ends the sequence of films, Rita Tushingham plays Brenda, a Northern girl newly-arrived in the capital, who works in a boutique and then becomes a model, thus acquiring a flat complete with beaded-curtain doors, wrought-iron spiral staircases — and an Egg chair. But these objects, like the fashionable clothes we often see — and the very lifestyle itself — are invariably transitory pleasures and possessions, soon to be whisked away within the stern workings of the diegesis.

Interestingly, *Alfie*, although scored by Sonny Rollins, is relentlessly dowdy in its *mise-en-scene*, using drab streets and dingy rented flats where faded yellow-and-brown wallpaper and tatty chintz predominate. So, too, is much of *Georgy Girl*. And there is nothing ‘swinging’ about the latter film’s title song, composed as it was by Tom Springfield and sung by the New Seekers, an earnest commercially minded folk trio.

The songs and jazz scores reinforced the contemporary awareness of these films; while the very demographics of the period always ensured that young cinema-going audiences would see their reflection on screen. They could ignore if they wished the underlying moralism that pervades the films and accompanies their depiction of a radically-changed culture.²⁵ Geraghty, Tarr and Hill all note the punishment of women for their sexual transgression here, just as in the earlier Northern-based cycle — either through unwanted pregnancy or emotional distress, sometimes both. There is, of course, a widespread myth that the sixties meant sexual freedom without fear of biological consequences — this was far from the case. The pill did not become widely available until later in the decade — at this point it could be obtained by the middle-classes, by students and, of course, by those willing and able to pay for private consultation. Even the diaphragm was not easily available in the early years of the decade.²⁶

But here the women are punished for other transgressions, too. As in the earlier films, it is women who are seen as complicit with the new consumerism. But here, in London, the opportunities for consumption are limitless. If the female protagonists are



Fig. 1. On her way up Diana/Darling has acquired not only a record-player but also a very chic Little Black Dress — a sign that her moral decline is well advanced. Permission: Getty Images.

not themselves part of the fashion industry, like Diana, they can nevertheless wear brand-new desirable designer clothes. And these often signal, just as surely as the possession of a massive mirrored bathroom and lushly-draped bedroom within the movies of 'classical' Hollywood, that the woman who owns or covets these things is perhaps untrustworthy (figure 1).

The heroine's selfish, promiscuous flatmate Meredith in *Georgy Girl*, played by the newly iconic Charlotte Rampling, wears clothes created by new designers Foale and Tuffin. While Diana in *Darling* is first seen in affordable, young, off-the-peg clothes, as a would-be actress, she is soon 'discovered' by the fashion industry and succumbs to the easier career of model. As she becomes increasingly successful — and mendacious — so she now wears stylish, expensive designer creations.

Blow-Up used well-known real-life models in its fictional fashion shoots — including Verushka, Peggy Moffitt and Tanya Mallett. And the process was continued through extra-diegetic means, by an alliance between different strands of the media. The new female stars — Christie, Rampling, Tushingham — appeared in both *Vogue* and the teen magazines, while the new male stars — or products, if you prefer — such as Michael Caine and Terence Stamp appeared in the Sunday supplements and even in *Vogue*, on the pages which ran throughout the decade, entitled 'People are talking about . . .'

All these new film stars appeared in David Bailey's *Box of Pinups*, the 1965 celebration by Swinging London's top photographer of its real-life repertory cast.²⁷ In fact, Michael Caine and Julie Christie were arguably the first British superstars, and could be linked directly to the process of consumption, whether they wanted it or not.

Certainly it was their personae, their performances, and the conflation or confusion between the actor and the role they were playing that made *Darling* and *Alfie* so successful at the time. Both films have a central protagonist who might have been thoroughly unsympathetic if they had been played by a less likeable, less popular star. Christie had been voted ‘Most Beautiful Woman in the World’ in a national student poll after her appearance in *Billy Liar*, while Caine had finally achieved international recognition as the working-class, ultra-cool answer to James Bond in *The Ipcress File* (1965). Other stars emerged within the cycle — Tushingham and Redgrave — but neither possessed such enduring iconic potency nor the links to style Christie and Caine represented. Both the ‘Julie Christie look’ and Caine’s stylish, bespectacled spy have been constantly referenced within fashion journalism in the intervening forty years — while at the time their images pervaded contemporary journalism at every market level — from *Vogue* to *Petticoat*. As early as 1963, Christie was *Honey*’s ‘Girl of the Month’, while in the following year Caine was the first-ever man on its cover (figure 2). He smiled knowingly out at the young readers — two years before *Alfie* was released — adorned by a blonde and a slogan, ‘A Girl’s Best Accessory is a Man.’ The accompanying article, inside, was entitled ‘File Under Cool.’ Such interchanges ensured that the films were linked clearly to fashionable consumption, while the cinematic narratives themselves carried out a critique of that process.

The Knack — And How To Get It

Setting up stylistic expectations, showcasing the new sexuality

A Canadian director, Richard Lester, who enjoyed a modest success with *The Running, Jumping and Standing Still Film* (1959), was invited to direct the Beatles’ first film, *A Hard Day’s Night* (1964). In *The Knack*, he continues to use the strategies of formal experimentation borrowed from both the French New Wave and avant-garde cinema to create his own form of anti-realism. He mixes freeze-frames, jump cuts, wipes, zooms, and speeded-up sequences together with different forms of montage, surreal dream sequences and direct address to camera, while at times there are moments taken from cinema-verite and the liberal use of voice-over, supposedly from onlookers who form a kind of Greek Chorus. There are also shots where the male characters pose as if for a magazine shoot — and, in a more direct link to fashion imagery, a further sequence where models are seen posed in the windows of disused buildings, as if for photospreads in the ‘gritty realism’ style.

The ‘fashion element’ infuses this film in different ways, both stylistic and thematic. Lester’s work with the Beatles — and his innovative formal strategies — set up expectations of a new kind of London-based cinema. And the stage play, here adapted for film by its author Ann Jellicoe, had been a critical success at the then-prestigious Royal Court Theatre — perhaps more important, it tackled new types of sexual behaviour.

The plot centres on a household in an unidentified, unfashionable area of London. The landlord is the hapless and frustrated schoolteacher, Colin (Michael Crawford). Openly envious of the sexual prowess of his lodger, Tolen (Ray Brooks), a water-skiing instructor, and hoping to emulate him, he sets out to rescue a vast, decorative iron bed

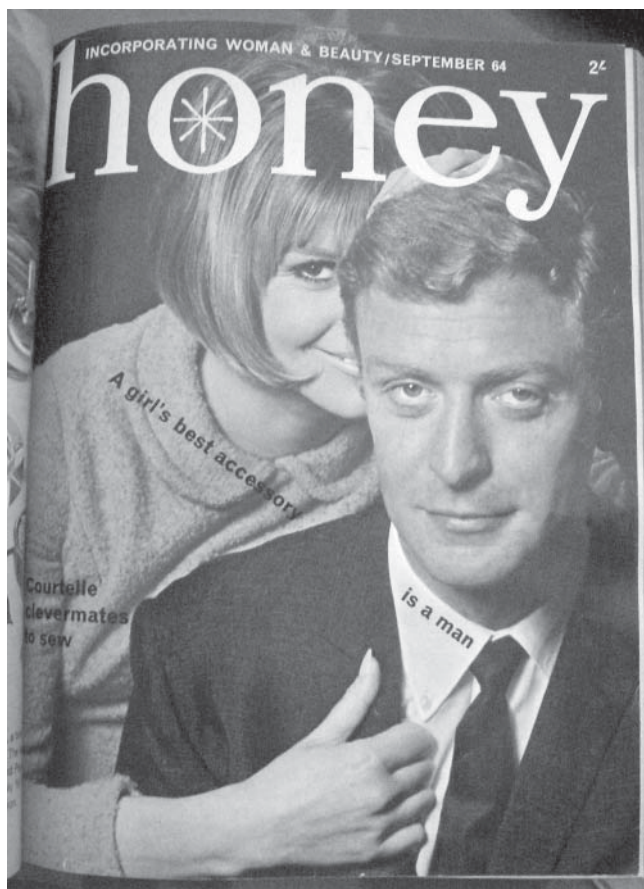


Fig. 2. Caine smirks at the teenage girls from the cover of *Honey* magazine, long before *Alfie* gazed from the screens — evidence of the dialogue and interchange between star images and fashion journalism in the mid-Sixties. Published by IPC magazines. Every effort has been made to trace the copyright owner of this image. Please contact Maney Publishing with any comments or enquiries.

from a scrap yard, in the hope that its very presence in his room will cause his luck to change. As he manhandles the bed through the streets of London, assisted by his other lodger, the amiable and unsuccessful artist Tom, they encounter a young girl, Nancy (Rita Tushingham) who is vainly searching for the YWCA. Nancy eventually sits upon the bedstead as they carry it down the steps of the Albert Hall and accompanies them back to the house.

We have already seen Nancy's arrival in London, seemingly in search of the kind of life we see her studying in the pages of *Honey* as the coach she is travelling on nears the capital. She is, in herself, an example of the ambivalence towards fashionable

consumption characteristic of these films. Tushingham was not conventionally pretty — but her enormous eyes, heavy fringe and jolie-laide appearance seemed to fit the new zeitgeist and this film made her a star. She always played quirky or even difficult characters who do not necessarily ‘fit in’ in appearance or behaviour.²⁸ Here, as Nancy, she wanders through the streets of Knightsbridge, and finds a fashionable shop. Going in, very out of place in her heavy coat, she tries on a modish, unbecoming hat. Looking at herself in the mirror, she pulls a hideous face at her reflection. She is swiftly accosted by a smooth-talking salesman, who guides her to a cubicle to try on a simple, fashionable shift dress — which she has already selected by herself. He then bestows upon her the benefit of his studied sales patter, and Nancy obediently buys the dress. As she waits to pay, still wearing the dress, which now forms her ‘costume’ for the rest of the film, she hears him using the very same words, phrases and compliments to the next customer. She joins him and loudly intones the words with him, much to his embarrassment.

Nancy is not the only one who is conscious of fashion. The director himself uses new, stylish visuals throughout — right down to the credit titles. John Barry’s atmospheric, jazz-inflected score reflects the film’s of-the-minute appearance and thematic preoccupations. Lodger Tom has painted his entire room white, including the bare floorboards, and white floorboards duly became fashionable. The bed that Tom helps Colin to carry across London is, in fact, itself newly-desirable — ‘Victoriana’ was becoming something sought-after, and this bed, crafted of white wrought-iron, was exactly the sort to be seen in the new Sunday supplements of the time. Tolen, meanwhile, has turned his own rented room into a snazzy ‘bachelor pad’ and he himself is a natty dresser. Strangely, his outfits are a fusion of biker chic (leather jacket and modified quiff) with the current ‘mod’ style of narrow trousers and Chelsea boots.

The plot focuses on changing sexual mores. Tolen possesses ‘the knack’ of successful seduction — we see, in one of Colin’s surreal dream sequences, an endless queue of identical blonde ‘dolly birds’, reading magazines as they line the stairwell, patiently waiting for their time-slot in Tolen’s bed. A girl who leaves the room is smiling happily as she sticks the Green Shield stamps she has earned into their book. Tolen, Colin and even Tom now try to charm the suspicious Nancy. Eventually, she faints — and then accuses first Tolen, and then Colin, of having raped her. This is one of the most unsettling sequences in the film — for the use of rape as the material for a series of jokes, both verbal and visual, is worrying in itself, and doubly so when the writer is a woman. Nancy runs down the street, knocking on front doors — when they are opened, she firmly announces ‘Rape, rape’, to be met with polite replies, ‘Not today, thank you’. She even goes so far as to grade her supposed rapist’s technique — ‘He raped me smashing, he did.’

This is doubly problematic in that it seems not only to suggest the false-memory syndrome so often attributed to women, but also to concur with the male fantasy of rape as wish-fulfilment. And the denouement — where Nancy links up romantically with fellow-innocent, Colin — is undercut. For although Tolen loses ‘the knack’ and cannot fill the Albert Hall auditorium with his conquests, being instead trampled underfoot by a horde of rapacious blondes, they are in fact knocking him aside in order to get to his fellow Lothario and former mentor, Rory McBride — who they follow happily into the pre-booked Hall.

In the closing moments, Nancy and Colin walk together, arm-in-arm, down the Embankment — but our abiding memory is of these recent scenes and the fact that the gift of ‘the knack’ will continue to be handed on from one cold-hearted womaniser to the next. Its modish appearance and topical themes not only secured for the film a huge commercial success, making it particularly popular with undergraduate audiences of the time; it was also rewarded with the Grand Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival. The film’s visual dexterity and overall stylishness disguised the more worrying aspects of the behaviour it depicted — and its use of ‘London’, despite the fact that we see so much of a drab, nameless suburb, seemed to promise a new, metropolitan cinema.

Interestingly, the Albert Hall, which does feature so memorably, had already been appropriated for youthful activity before the film was released. The first self-styled ‘Happening’, a famous poetry reading, was organised there earlier in the year by Michael Horowitz. Allan Ginsberg among others read aloud, while a white-clad girl staged an impromptu dance along the aisles — others distributed flowers and openly circulated spliffs. The whole event was captured on film by young documentary-maker Peter Whitehead, who had already begun to chronicle the ‘Swinging Sixties’ as events unfolded around him.²⁹

Darling

The world of fashion — pitfalls and predators

This next London-based film describes the rise of an ambitious girl within the world of fashion and chronicles her relationship with a successful television journalist involved in the brand-new world of ‘arts programming’. Consequently, it seemed through its very settings to meet the expectations created by *The Knack*, that new films, depicting the new London lifestyles, were now replacing the dour depictions of working-class life. And the fact that the heroine was a model was vital. Models in the fifties were anonymous aristocratic beauties; Jean Shrimpton, first of the sixties supermodels, was both personality and fashion leader in her own right, and seemed far more accessible than her predecessors. She talked freely in interviews about her childhood on a small farm — and the fact that she was cohabiting with the Cockney photographer, David Bailey. Her persona — like that of Christie — was presented within the magazines as young, friendly, approachable.

The screenwriter of *Darling*, Frederic Raphael, had himself achieved some fame within the two worlds of journalism and broadcasting. He could, therefore, create a convincing writer and broadcaster in Robert (Dirk Bogarde), a happily married man with children who is the first to be ensnared by Diana. She soon leaves her own husband, who cannot help her in her career, and encourages Robert to abandon wife and family. There are hints of her conventional Sussex background, and later we see her rich sister and her house in the country. Diana however wants far more than financial security — she craves fame, excitement, and city life.

It is sometimes difficult to gauge Diana’s actual feelings, since the use of voice-over throughout shows us exactly how unreliable and duplicitous she can be. Diana herself

provides this voice-over, as she tells the story of her life to the readers of a woman's magazine, and there is a deliberate discrepancy between her account of events and the action on screen, between her careful, cosmeticised description of her career and the ruthless ambition which director John Schlesinger so carefully portrays. Schlesinger had already made his first feature film, *A Kind of Loving* (1962) as part of the British New Wave cycle. Now he, like Christie, was ready to recount a metropolitan tale — for which Johnny Dankworth provided an authentic jazz score.

In a telling image, the film begins with the shot of a vast hoarding, where a poster which advertises both the magazine itself and this very serialisation of her life-story, using an enormous image of Diana's face, is being pasted on a billboard so as to obliterate the face of a starving African child, on a poster for the fictitious charity, World Hunger. And later on, in the film's savage critique — and visual enjoyment — of London's beau monde, we see a World Hunger charity benefit, where over-dressed society women pile food on their plates, watched impassively by a line of young black boys in fancy dress, bewigged and befrilled to make of them eighteenth-century flunkeys.

As Geraghty has rightly emphasised, the use of her sexuality is Diana's mode of social control, and is difficult to distinguish from power.³⁰ So when, after living with Robert for some time and becoming a fixture on the smart London scene, she begins a liaison with the suave advertising executive Miles (Laurence Harvey), it is difficult to ascertain exactly what she feels. So far, she has failed in her acting career, walking out of one audition in exasperation, but she is nevertheless determined to make some sort of mark — she has had Robert's child aborted because it would have been 'so inconvenient at that moment.' Miles ensures that she is made 'The Honeyglow Girl' in a lucrative campaign for a cosmetic company — we see him triumphantly displaying her picture at a meeting, holding it up to enrapture a room full of paunchy, balding men of uncertain years. She certainly seems to find that he can provide her with more fun than the serious Robert — in the first of the 'zany' episodes, we see her driving Miles' open-topped sports car round and round Trafalgar Square as dawn breaks over London.³¹ Yet the Paris she sees with Miles is different from the Paris she found on her first adulterous trip there, with Robert, when she and Robert were still conducting a clandestine affair, and he introduced her to artists and writers. Miles, on the contrary, shows her the underbelly of the city — they attend a society 'orgy' where the participants must dance slowly around the room, gradually shedding their clothes and revealing their secrets. Diana is quite capable of dealing with this — and proves a worthy sparring partner for both Miles himself and his decadent Parisian acquaintances.

However, it is this affair, and her clumsy attempts to conceal it using tactics borrowed from Robert himself, that alerts him to the true nature of her relationship with Miles. Robert confronts her at a glossy private view where he finds her, completely ignoring the paintings, air-kissing affectedly and rotating purposefully among the other guests, wearing a smart black coatdress and a Courrèges-inspired hat. He drags her out and forces her to admit her infidelity — she makes out of this a tremendous scene on the Underground, proving her innate love of histrionics. Yet she is unprepared for Robert's reaction — which is to abandon her.

Her distress is noticeable to the gay photographer who is taking the pictures for the 'Honeyglow' campaign. Diana and he become inseparable, and the second 'zany' episode — which no critic has mentioned in any detail — takes place when the two of them go on an expedition to Fortnum and Mason. Diana swiftly turns this into a shop-lifting expedition, managing to remove tins and bottles containing expensive delicacies from this Establishment emporium. They return to her flat, and feast on the spoils — but as a result of Diana drunkenly feeding her beloved pet fishes with peaches soaked in brandy, these fish, which had symbolised her domestic life with Robert, die in pain.

Diana is sent on an assignment to Italy, to film a commercial for chocolates in a vast palazzo owned by an Italian prince, a widower old enough to be Diana's own father. He is clearly taken with her — but Diana is looking forward to her holiday in Capri with the photographer. Although their holiday seems at first to be idyllic, and she fantasises about the two of them settling down there, she is soon angry. For the two of them share the sexual favours of a good-looking waiter — and Diana is not used to sharing. She turns down the prince's proposal, however — but later, realising that she is bored with her life, her career is tedious and there is no possibility of any rapprochement with Robert, she marries the Italian, tempted by a life of leisure and luxury. The camera follows her through the sumptuous rooms of his palace, where she dines in splendour and it carefully records the sight of her misery, even as she tells the magazine readers of her delight at carrying out the charitable works that her husband has suggested.

Christie completed her commentary on this film by stating:

Of course at the time this was seen as greedy promiscuity, which is why she had to be punished . . . But there was an element of possibility for women, a new way of living, which is why the film was so successful.³²

This is an interesting reading — but Christie seems to be unaware of the precise intricacy of the misogynistic twists within the plot. There is indeed just the *glimpse* of a new 'way of living' but it is not one that can be sustained — and it is snatched away precisely, paradoxically, because the kind of woman who could create this way of living for herself is seen as so selfish and manipulative that she is, ultimately, self-destructive. Robert, alone with his books and his writing, has these for solace. He sends Diana back to Italy sobbing when she tries, at the close of the film, to leave the prince and return to him. Given Diana's nature, her appeal to audiences then and now might be puzzling, were it not for the fact that she is played by Christie, an actress known to dislike publicity, to be generous and bohemian. Kenneth Tynan complained at the time that 'she is hopelessly miscast — she's too blazingly nice.'³³ But paradoxically, this 'miscasting' made the film attractive. It also earned Oscars for both Christie and Raphael.

Alfie

A working-class hero chastised?

This film, made the following year, is a long way from the fashionable milieu of *Darling*. The antihero is a chauffeur, and the film portrays working-class London. However,

part of the mythology of the period being carefully crafted at the time concerned class. Newspapers, magazines, television programmes discussed the issue — and stressed the working-class backgrounds of the new stars in the worlds of fashion and music. Indeed, the year of the film's release coincided with the first photographs of Twiggy, the first accounts of her childhood in a Neasden council house and her previous job as a hairdresser. It was suggested — by middle-class journalists carefully, quietly preserving their own positions of privilege — that it might be 'cooler' to be working-class. Certainly Caine's own childhood — as the son of a Billingsgate fish vendor — was heavily publicised. So, too, was his close friendship with his fellow Cockney, the young actor Terence Stamp — currently much photographed, as the new boyfriend of Jean Shrimpton. These extra-diegetic factors were vital in assisting the commercial success of the film — and lay behind the way it was presented in posters and publicity material. Like *Darling*, its casting created its appeal. The film posters at the time were headlined 'Michael Caine IS Alfie!' and a contemporary reviewer suggested:

Like the new bright clothes on the new bright boys, *Alfie* suggests a subterranean force of nature rising to impress even the locals.³⁴

But Caine, whose face occupies the screen for the majority of the film, is the only object proffered up in this film for our consumption. As I've stressed earlier, the settings — drab streets in South and West London, seedy rented bed-sits, a TB sanatorium — are relentlessly drab, while the women's clothes are dowdy and Alfie's own outfits are curiously dated, given his fondness for crested blazers and flannel trousers. Even Ruby (Shelley Winters), the rich widow who drops Alfie for a younger boyfriend who's also a would-be rock star and thus is seen as more in keeping with the times, is not exactly stylish either in dress or in the décor of her more expensive flat. She herself has a fifties perm and a black negligee.

Those who see the film as epitomising Swinging London presumably do so simply because it depicts another successful Lothario, and a 'working-class hero' at that. The episodic plot has one woman after another succumbing to Alfie's charm, until Ruby opts for her younger guitarist and cites his youth as the reason. But the sexual antics hardly enliven what is actually a grim moral tale — with two unwanted pregnancies, an illegal abortion, a bout of tuberculosis and the loss of his son forming the rest of Alfie's adventures. In its setting and its overt moralising, it is perhaps the closest film to the British New Wave — but it is modernised in various ways.

Once again, the source was a play, adapted for the screen by its author. This time Bill Naughton was asked to adapt a radio play he had written in the late fifties, 'Alfie Elkins and his Secret Lives', in which the philandering hero is seen as hapless and pathetic rather than a 'bright new . . . force of nature'.³⁵ The title song was part of the process by which the play was updated. 'What's it all about, Alfie?' sung on the soundtrack by Cher with a musical arrangement by her then husband, Sonny, became a hit for both Cilla Black and Dionne Warwick — and another Sonny, the jazz maestro Sonny Rollins, provided the score.

Director, Lewis Gilbert, adopted new techniques and made use of endless direct address to camera from Alfie himself. This was perhaps Brechtian in intention, but it does not have the effect of 'alienation.' Quite the reverse — it encourages us to see

everything from Alfie's perspective, and since Alfie 'is' the amiable, affable Caine, it makes his non-stop misogyny almost, though not quite, bearable. Alfie refers to women as 'birds' and to each separate bird as 'it'. For example he tells the audience at the beginning, talking of the married woman in his car: 'Listen to it laugh, willya? It was bleedin' miserable half an hour ago when I picked it up.'

Nevertheless, *Alfie* has attracted more academic interest than any of these other films, with the exception of *Darling*. It's difficult to sympathise with some of the critical writing — Carson for example describes it as a 'comedy of the sexes'.³⁶ However, his argument is undermined by the still from the film that accompanies his article.³⁷ Here, a grim-faced Alfie, a backstreet abortionist (Denholm Elliott) in a grubby raincoat, and a middle-aged woman in a dowdy print housedress stand in Alfie's bed sit, staring it seems into space. In the room with them — though out of shot here — is a basin containing a recently aborted foetus.

Hill's discussion of the film, as a later variant on the Northern cycle, is a truer reflection of the film. He chooses for illustration a still where Alfie again stares into space, this time surrounded by nappies that hang from a Dutch dryer.³⁸ This scene is set in the tiny flat of 'little Gilda' (Julia Foster), the young girl who, finding herself pregnant, has insisted on keeping Alfie's child and is attempting to bring the baby up on her own. Gilda lives in a back street, where children play among the parked cars, that calls to mind the fifties photographs of Roger Mayne — but she is finally rescued from her difficult circumstances by the good-natured bus conductor she marries.

Nevertheless, although Alfie therefore loses contact with his son, and is left walking along the river with the stray dog he tried to chase away at the start of the film, he is still wearing a smile. Caine seems to be presented here as the cheerful Cockney sparrow, the Blitz spirit personified, so familiar from British war films of the 1950s. He may be humbled but he will soldier on — he'll 'never say die.' This particular interpretation of the working-class hero is not just patronising beyond belief. No, at this moment when the arrival of a 'classless society' was being heralded in the middle-class media, it seems designed to remind audiences not only of the validity of class stereotypes, but of the immutability of class barriers and social boundaries.

Morgan — A Suitable Case For Treatment

Old-fashioned class conflict in the new art world

Here, a very different working-class hero is trying to survive both the oppressive London 'art world' and — more sadly for him — the seemingly inevitable loss of his upper middle-class wife, seen divorcing him in the opening moments. Once again, a stage play was the source — and in adapting his play for the screen, David Mercer made some significant changes. In the play, Morgan is a writer rather than a painter — and more significantly, has been unfaithful to his wife. It is only after she has discovered his continuing infidelity that his wife seeks comfort through a relationship with his publisher. And finally, in the play, Morgan decides to move in with his girlfriend — so that the ending is both low-key and even predictable.

Karel Reisz, another director who had contributed to the Northern New Wave, directed the film. Here, Morgan (David Warner) is a much more developed, sympathetic character. He is devastated when his wife Leonie (Vanessa Redgrave) takes up with the smarmy owner of the gallery where he exhibits his paintings (Robert Stephens), and is encouraged to divorce Morgan by both lover and her rich Rolls-Royce-owning parents. The character of Morgan's mother — like him, a fervent Marxist — is extended in the film. She is played by Irene Handl, and given a 'caff' in the East End to run. A scene is added where Morgan takes her to Marx's grave in Highgate Cemetery to lay flowers — 'it's HIS birthday.' He gives her a piggyback on the return journey — thus making the 'zany' behaviour more sympathetic, more politicised, less inherently foolish.

In addition to these changes and the addition of further fantasy sequences, Reisz asked Dankworth — after his work on *Darling* — to provide the score. His casting of David Warner as Morgan was also very significant. Warner had made his debut four years earlier at Stratford, as Henry VI, and went on to play Hamlet as a wayward student complete with college scarf. His impressive talent and blonde good looks led to his appearance in *Vogue*.

Morgan finds the 'real world' difficult — as the title implies, he has already been sent to see a therapist. He prefers animals to people — watching housepainters at work, he transforms them into chimpanzees swinging gracefully through the jungle, while a yawning ticket-collector metamorphoses into a hippopotamus. He even suggests to his worried mother, 'If I'd been conceived in the womb of a chimpanzee, none of this would ever have happened.'

Thus the film offers up the gallery world and the upper-middle-classes for our criticism, making class conflict explicit through Morgan's devout Marxism and his own social background. His beliefs are seen as powerless in the harsh materialism of the new London. Morgan is inexorably destroyed by it, by the powerful, fashionable middle-class world which Leonie and her lover inhabit. Indeed, he ends up imprisoned in a mental hospital. Morgan in his black polo-neck is set against Leonie in her designer clothes; the flat they used to share she has repainted starkly white and filled with fashionable objects — Morgan's paintings and political memorabilia have been consigned to an attic.

Although he moves back temporarily into the attic, booby-traps her white-draped bed, and, in desperation, kidnaps Leonie and takes her off to the country, there is nothing he can do to keep her permanently with him. She is determined to marry the gallery owner — and all Morgan can do is to sabotage the smart wedding celebrations. Dressed in a gorilla suit, he rides on his motorbike towards the opulent riverside restaurant Leonie has chosen. His gorilla suit catches fire, he loses control of his vehicle and is catapulted onto the table amongst the appalled wedding guests. The middle classes exact their revenge — Morgan is 'sectioned'.

The film ends with a very pregnant Leonie visiting the incarcerated Morgan. She finds him happily working in the hospital gardens. As she leaves, having confirmed his belief that he is the father of her baby, the camera pulls back, up and away from the smiling Leonie to reveal the flowerbed Morgan has created. Rather than the expected floral clock, he has planted the round bed so as to create a vast hammer-and-sickle.

Despite the humour of the closing shot, it is seen as a vain gesture. After all, Leonie has not only defeated him through the power of caste, she is also deceiving her new husband and thus reinforcing the misogyny that underlies this film — it is women who align themselves with the new fashions, the new superficiality, the sycophantic art-world.

Georgy Girl

Female experience and the new 'freedom'

This film directed by Silvio Nazzarino, with a less-impressive jazz-inflected score by Alexander Faris, and adapted by Margaret Forster from her own novel, shows us class and gender issues from a different perspective. The film moves between a then-unfashionable Maida Vale, where Georgy (Lynn Redgrave) rents a small flat, and a smart suburb where her parents are 'in service' to the rich 'Mr. James' (James Mason). He has funded her education and she uses a room in his house for the infants' music-and-movement classes she teaches. 'Mr. James' has an interest in her that stretches beyond the pedagogic — early on in the film, he asks her to be his mistress, but she rejects his offer.

Georgy is plump, plain and virginal — her modish flatmate, the violinist Meredith (Charlotte Rampling) is pretty, promiscuous and middle-class. Her nominal boyfriend, Jos (Alan Bates) another musician, spends much of his time in the flat — so Georgy often sleeps on the sofa. Meredith treats her as cook, cleaner and financial backer, otherwise ignoring her — it is Georgy's own idea, it seems, to attempt the transformation we see behind the credit sequence, to the accompaniment of the film's theme song. She goes into a hairdresser — and emerges with a 'beehive' hairdo that looks as absurd and unflattering as does the fashionable hat on Tushingham in *The Knack*.

Jos makes Meredith pregnant, to her fury — but she eventually agrees to marry him. Georgy and Jos, however, are thrilled about the baby and study parenting books together. While Meredith is in hospital, giving birth, they discover a mutual attraction — after the necessary 'zany' sequence, when after dark they lark about on the swings and roundabout in the nearby children's playground. On the way home, they are soaked by an unexpected summer storm — and it is on their return that Georgy accompanies Jos into the bedroom. She is consumed with guilt, while at the same time clearly cares for him. But when she sees the baby, she is thrilled — and then appalled at Meredith's announcement that she intends to give the child up for adoption. Selfish, one-dimensional, Meredith very soon dons her 'fun fur' and is driven off in a sports car, carrying only her violin, to an unknown destination, by another anonymous boyfriend.

Georgy and Jos embark briefly upon a semblance of married life — but Jos soon tires of Georgy's devotion to the child. Surely earmarked for selfishness, since he himself has an interest in fashion — a Beatle haircut, a baker-boy cap and a selection of floral shirts — we see him quietly abandoning domestic responsibility, sneaking away with a holdall while Georgy sits in the playground with the baby in its pram.

Georgy is now in a difficult position — she has no legal claim on the child she adores, and there is the possibility that a social worker might intervene. She therefore

tells ‘Mr. James’ that she will reconsider his offer, provided it is sanctified by marriage. The film ends with his worried glance at her as they drive away from their church wedding — she doesn’t notice, since she has the child on her lap — and a shot of her parents, equally perturbed.

Yet despite the ramifications of this moralistic tale, it was seen at the time of its release as celebrating the new London. The patterning around class, power and sexuality was ignored. Georgy’s choices in the film are limited by her homely appearance as much as by her humble background. She does not meet the physical requirements of the period — she is not slim, nor pretty. Consequently, although she does experiment with the new sexuality, she has to settle for marriage to a man for whom she has no feelings other than gratitude. Meredith, who does indeed fit the physical template of the desirable ‘dolly bird’ of the period, and who is casually promiscuous, is depicted as unkind, even cruel. And although she may seem to escape in a sports car, it is important to note that she is the passenger, not the driver.

Blow-Up

The photographer as anti-hero, the ‘scene’ as seamy

Michaelangelo Antonioni, a director who had achieved international acclaim, chose London as the setting for the first of the films he would make outside his native Italy. He had recently completed a trilogy that explored the anomie of the rich, urban middle-classes in Italy — so his scrutinising of a foreign city could be equally critical. He found a novel to adapt — and changed the profession of the hero from painter to photographer. He asked jazz musician Herbie Hancock to create the score, and playwright Edward Bond wrote the screenplay to Antonioni’s specifications, using the director’s extensive research into the lifestyle of London fashion photographers. What Antonioni told an interviewer is interesting:

I think London is the place to be in and fashion photographers here belong to the moment. They are without background — one doesn’t know where they come from. Like the girl in the film, played by Vanessa Redgrave — no one knows anything about her, not even her name.³⁹

He cast David Hemmings as the central protagonist, used real-life fashion photographer John Cowan’s chic mews flat and studio as a set, and gave Hemmings’ character, Thomas, a newly-desirable white Rolls-Royce convertible, like that owned by John Lennon. The film is remembered for the first fashion shoot, with Verushka — but in fact Thomas has already made it clear that he is thoroughly bored by fashion photography and wants to move into photojournalism. In fact, he tells his agent that he’s had enough of ‘the bitches’ — and during the second shoot, he simply walks out and drives away, leaving models and fashion editor in limbo. The film is actually centred around his accidental discovery of a murder and his abortive attempts to resolve the crime he seems accidentally to have captured on film.

As he drives around London, we see some recognisable ‘swinging’ sights — junk shops, pillar-boxes, even bearskins — but much that is not a part of this agenda

— nuns, a mime troupe, and a suburban park. His search takes him to a live gig where the Yardbirds are playing and to a Hampstead party where drugs circulate freely — but he is jaded by fashionable excesses. As he tells his agent, ‘I’ve gone off London this week, it doesn’t do anything for me.’

Thomas is an unsympathetic character — and his own misogyny is reflected in every aspect of his behaviour. Perhaps the most notable sequence involves two very young, working-class, girls who haunt his house — identically dressed, they want to be models. When he finally lets them in, they find a rail of clothes that enchant them — but Thomas spoils their game and swiftly engages them in a bout of not-altogether consensual sex on a roll of photographic paper. He then immediately throws them out, telling them that he’s got work to do. They are denied the photos they wanted, their experience of the fashionable world nasty, brutish and short.

But even the sharp Thomas is foiled by his cool middle-class adversary (Vanessa Redgrave) and her unknown co-conspirators. Inevitably, she uses sex as a bargaining counter, peeling off her shirt soon after she enters his flat in search of the incriminating photographs she knows him to have taken.

There is no resolution — his film and prints stolen, Thomas returns to the park to find the body gone. The film ends with the memorable shot of him returning an imaginary tennis ball to the mime troupe at their request. The camera again pulls high up and moves further and further away, finally making minute the park where the actors are pretending to play tennis and where the murder may — or may not — have taken place.

Once again, the film was enthusiastically received by public and critics alike — the combination of director, subject and locale touched a nerve. But it makes for problematic viewing in terms of gender — and class. The middle-class ‘woman of mystery’ fools streetwise Thomas. She tricks him, just as he exploits the little girls. It seems he should stay in the despised fashion industry, where his presence is permitted, and not venture further afield.

Conclusion

The film *Smashing Time* (1967), critically damned at the time, attempts to function as a ‘satire’ of Swinging London, though its settings, situations and images are not those of its cinematic precursors. Here we do actually see Carnaby Street for the first time. However, it is only as a background to the humiliation of Yvonne (Redgrave) a Northern working-class girl — who is photographed by a ‘trendy’ photographer as she walks down the street. She finds out the next day when the pictures are published that he wanted to capture her image because of her poor taste, unflattering clothes and unfashionable girth. However, she does manage to find brief success with a hit single, while her friend Brenda (Rita Tushingham) is ‘discovered’ and becomes a photographic model. The film criss-crosses central London in a way that the earlier films did not and the penultimate scene takes place in the new, fashionable revolving restaurant atop the Post Office Tower — like all the sequences within the film, it culminates in a prolonged food fight.

If this lamentable film is memorable at all, it is not for the heavy-handed slapstick; rather, it is for two other factors. Firstly there is the assumption that any ‘fashionable’ career would by now automatically involve the exploitation of the young and foolish. Secondly, there are unwelcome, unpleasant assumptions around gender, class and sexuality which become apparent when the two girls work first as nightclub ‘escorts’ and which continue throughout the film in their dealings with various employers.

Thirdly, there is the casting of Redgrave and Tushingham — as two girls from The North who recognise that London is a harsh environment, which devours the unwary — and who are seen leaving for home in the closing shot.

The ‘consumption’ process, throughout these films, moves beyond fashion and lifestyle. Women themselves are offered up for consumption, in and by the cinematic process. They seem either to be as expendable as the new fashions, or to be instrumental in their own destruction — either way, retribution follows transgression. And the dubious moralising extends to the dialogues around class begun within the Northern New Wave. Alfie’s status as chauffeur, Morgan’s failed cross-class marriage, and Georgy’s background — all these ensure their eventual humbling.

The films are full of *movement*, often frantic in its quality — but there is no true mobility, no progress, only a reaffirming of the status quo. The cinematic tropes and the language that unites them are used to create grim fables, infused with this strange sense of constant movement without purpose, and by their presentation of uneasy dialogues around the new forms of consumption.

Many of today’s students idolise the Sixties as a time of general licence and still envisage a ‘swinging London’ of mini-skirts and Mini-Coopers. In fact, *The Italian Job* (1967), which stars Michael Caine and a chase sequence involving three of these same cars, was recently remastered on DVD; it regularly features in the ‘Best Films’ list within the various magazines targeted at today’s fashion-literate young male consumers. Contemporary fashion designers seem unable to stop reviving the clothes of the period — which are recycled year after year. But students and designers don’t realise that this was a decade dependent for its particular functioning on exploitation, through gender, class, or both. Elizabeth Wilson is one of the few critics who have suggested that there is surely a clear link between the fashion imagery of the time — dependent on doll-like, pliant, sexually available girls — and the radical feminism of the following decade.⁴⁰ Perhaps it might also explain the virulent anti-fashion rhetoric that infused so much second-wave feminist writing and activity, and which still casts its shadow, thirty years on.

NOTES

¹ See ‘Everybody’s Darling: An Interview with Julie Christie’, in Sara Maitland, *Very Heaven* (1988), 167–72.

² John Hill’s book *Sex, Class and Realism: British Cinema 1956–1963* (1986) gives the most comprehensive account of the British New Wave.

³ A. Walker, *Hollywood England: the British Film Industry in the Sixties* (1978), 167.

⁴ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*.

- ⁵ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*.
- ⁶ B. Carson, 'Comedy, Sexuality and 'Swinging London' Films', *Journal of Popular British Cinema*, 1, (1998), 48–63.
- ⁷ A. Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy and the United States* (Oxford, 1999), 269–70.
- ⁸ M. Luckett, 'Travel and Mobility: Femininity and National Identity in Swinging London Films', in J. Ashby and A. Higson (eds.), *British Cinema Past and Present* (2000), 115–33.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ C. Brunson, 'The Poignancy of Place: London and the City', *Visual Culture in Britain*, 5, (2004), 59–73.
- ¹⁷ The three Austin Powers' films were released in 1997, 1999, and 2002. All three were extremely successful at the box office.
- ¹⁸ See, in addition to the essay by Brunson and the book by Hill already cited, the essay by Carrie Tarr, 'Sapphire, Darling and the Boundaries of Permitted Pleasure', *Screen*, 26, 1, (1985), 50–65 and Christine Geraghty's essay, 'Women and Sixties British Cinema: The Development of the Darling Girl', in R. Murphy (ed.), *The British Cinema Book* (1997), 154–67.
- ¹⁹ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*; Robert Murphy *Sixties British Cinema* (1992), 115–33.
- ²⁰ For a journalistic account of the period and a description of Fraser's central role, see Shawn Levy, *Ready Steady Go! Swinging London and the Invention of Cool* (2002).
- ²¹ See Mary Quant's autobiography, *Quant by Quant* (1966).
- ²² Marianne Faithfull in her own autobiography has a good deal to say about the enthusiastic welcome which fashionable London society extended to the new bands of the period. See *Faithfull: An Autobiography* (New York, 1994).
- ²³ This phrase forms the title of Jonathan Aitken's contemporary account of the period, *The Young Meteors* (New York, 1967).
- ²⁴ Carson, 'Comedy, Sexuality and 'Swinging London' Films', 53.
- ²⁵ I am currently conducting a series of interviews with those who saw the films upon their release, to discuss their responses then and now and to be used in a subsequent study of the period.
- ²⁶ In her autobiographical account of the decade, the feminist historian Sheila Rowbotham recounts her own recourse to a private gynaecologist to obtain a diaphragm. See Rowbotham, *Promise of A Dream: Remembering the Sixties* (2000), 58–9.
- ²⁷ D. Bailey and F. Wyndham, *David Bailey's Box of Pin-Ups* (1965).
- ²⁸ Carson, 'Comedy, Sexuality and 'Swinging London' Films', 48.
- ²⁹ Peter Whitehead's documentary of the event, *Wholly Communion* (1965) was not screened on television for some time.
- ³⁰ Geraghty, 'Women and Sixties British Cinema', 161.
- ³¹ Brunson, 'The Poignancy of Place: London and the City', 64.
- ³² Maitland, 'Everybody's Darling: An Interview with Julie Christie', 171.
- ³³ It was Tynan who reviewed *Darling* for *The Observer*, 19 September 1965.
- ³⁴ Isobel Quigley wrote an enthusiastic review of *Alfie* for *The Spectator* published 1 April 1966.
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Carson, 'Comedy, Sexuality and 'Swinging London' Films', 35.
- ³⁷ Ibid. 48.
- ³⁸ Hill, *Sex, Class and Realism*.

³⁹ Walker, *Hollywood England*.

⁴⁰ E. Wilson, *Only Halfway to Paradise: Women in Post-war Britain 1945–1968* (1990), 111.

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